



Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire

David Anderson

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In "a gripping narrative that is all but impossible to put down" (Joseph C. Miller), *Histories of the Hanged* exposes the long-hidden colonial crimes of the British in Kenya. This groundbreaking work tells how the brutal war between the colonial government and the insurrectionist Mau Mau between 1952 and 1960 dominated the final bloody decade of imperialism in East Africa. Using extraordinary new evidence, David Anderson puts the colonial government on trial with eyewitness testimony from over 800 court cases and previously unseen archives. His research exonerates the Kikuyu rebels; hardly the terrorists they were thought to be; and reveals the British to be brutal aggressors in a "dirty war" that involved leaders at the highest ranks of the British government. This astonishing piece of scholarship portrays a teetering colonial empire in its final phase; employing whatever military and propaganda methods it could to preserve an order that could no longer hold.

Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire Details

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Author : David Anderson

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Andrea says

This is one of two books (the other is Imperial Reckoning) that explores the Mau Mau rebellion and the British response fully. The Mau Mau may not have been nationalist heroes, but the British response was brutal. Not pleasant reading, but a good corrective to any tendency to romanticize colonialism.

Stacia says

Before I read this book, I could fit everything I knew about the Mau Mau uprising into two sentences--and as it turns out, all of it was wrong. This is a very well researched, extremely readable history of Mau Mau in Kenya, from the late 1940s until the early 1960s. Highly recommended for anyone who is interested in the history of East Africa.

Doreen Petersen says

Very interesting to find out more about the history of Kenya than I ever knew.

Anne-Marie Hodge says

A very comprehensive and even-handed history of how Kenya's Mau Mau movement developed, progressed, and ultimately ended (although you can't say it was necessarily "resolved"). Good scholarship and insights into the factors motivating all sides of the issues at hand. This was such a horrific period and was really the absolute low point of British colonialism; it's a shame that it doesn't get more attention in history classes.

Matt says

While the description of the book says it's a gripping narrative, the reality is much different. That doesn't mean it's not a good book - it's an excellent work of history, but like many history books, it jumps around a little bit to capture all of the stories.

The Mau Mau Rebellion was a dark time in Kenya's history and the response of the British seems to have been nearly as brutal. Anderson's focus is on the British response, but there are wide swaths of coverage of Mau Mau atrocities. Given the violence on both sides, this is a heavy book and a bit of a slower read, but if you're interested at all in colonial politics in Africa or Kenyan history in general, it's worthwhile.

Maggie says

Deeply heartbreakng and enlightening, even/especially for me as a Kenyan. The author was quite purposeful with presenting the Mau Mau as a complicated, fractured, brave (tribalist) group (mainly) singularly joined by the goal of repossessing stolen land.

I was perpetually stunned and disgusted by how uniquely British colonialism took on incredibly and increasingly ruthless and barbaric violence as well as the intricate and wholesale invisibilization of it all.

The author was sometimes too fair with the idea that "justice" could somehow be achieved in the colonial courts but ... the premise itself is ridiculous. Colonialism itself is violence; anything built on top of it, regardless of its professionalism, legitimizes and perpetuates that violence.

Loved, loved, loved the book though. Read it :)

Kuldip S Attalia says

Highly recommended - A Must for all Kenyans.

'It is a powerful message, and a timely reminder of the brutal crimes of Empire.'

'By calling for reconciliation in the early years of his presidency, Pr Mzee Jomo Kenyatta understandably sacrificed the past for the future.

But today young Kenyans know next to nothing about the Mau Mau uprising and how it led to independence.

For them, these books are an incomparable record of what happened in, and to, their country.

For others, parallels with American foreign policy today are apparent enough.'

"The stories of the Mau Mau have an unmistakable lesson for today."

Mariam says

this book talks about how the leaders of the British empire in Kenya dealt with the Mau Mau and the people of Kenya. it shows how most of the leaders were biased and were doing more to please the British settlers than to actually deal and solve the problems of Kenyan citizens who were mistreated the most by Mau Mau and the British rulings.

Mark Eickhoff says

Fascinating, generally well-written history of the 1950's Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya. It is a pretty balanced account--in a-pox-on-all-your-houses sort of way. It provides proof, yet again, that war is hell and a dirty business, that men are capable of all sorts of cruelty and inhumanity to other men, civilization isn't as civilized as it likes to think, and that we live in a fallen and sinful world.

Tom says

Anderson just wrote this NYT op-ed re Brits recently admitting to torture in Kenya and agreeing to some reparations, however small. Led me to look up his book. "The horror, the horror." Imagine the tea cups shattering throughout House of Lords (not that we Yanks have any reason to be smug on this matter). <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/13/opi...>

Nikki says

Interesting topic but really poorly written. It has a strong political bias. It is more a recounting of events and an effort to prove the British wrong at every step. I am not saying who was and who wasn't wrong, but there is no real story told in this book because the closest thing you have to a protagonist is the revolution.

Of perhaps more interest is that I read the book at the behest of a Kenyan whose family suffered greatly during the revolution. He said it was the only book that really recounted the events accurately.

Aubrey Stapp says

Couldn't finish it, the writing was just too dull. It's amazing that with such an interesting topic he still manages to be so boring.

Kevin says

A pivotal piece of research of a very unfortunate time period and of what had been an often misrepresented history. From an academic perspective I appreciate the thought and thorough history this book provides, but from a reader's perspective a lot seems repetitive--which is a reality of the actual history and the horrors that occurred. It was important given the revisionist history to be so thorough, but at the same time it may prevent less dedicated people from learning the basics of the history of that time.

Gramarye says

A tightly-written, hard-hitting work of well-researched history that tackles a particularly grim chapter in Britain's retreat from empire. Anderson's meticulous account of the Mau Mau conflict in late colonial Kenya is all the more damning for its careful marshalling of court records, public and private documents, and other firsthand accounts to build his story. First-rate historical research and writing.

Christopher Saunders says

David Anderson's **Histories of the Hanged** is probably the definitive account of the Mau-Mau insurgency in 1950s Kenya. If the book has a shortcoming, it's a bit skimpy on historical and ethnic background (a few terse chapters on Kikuyu grievances against British land policies) before leaping into the main narrative, but its accounts of skirmishes, atrocities and trials are meticulously documented and darkly engaging from there. Like most Western historians, Anderson finds it hard to sympathize with the Mau Mau, detailing their gruesome murderers of white settlers and black collaborators; but he finds it even harder to condone the British overreaction, which led to bloody punitive expeditions, mass arrests, summary executions and concentration camps. All this while moderate Kenyan nationalists like Jomo Kenyatta maneuvered to make their brand of political action preferable to further outbreaks violence. Much better than Caroline Elkins' sensationalized Imperial Reckoning; its minor shortcomings don't devalue its worth as a chronicle of a much-misrepresented colonial conflict.
